

## What to Look for in a High-Quality, Literacy-Rich, Inclusive Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Learning Environment



**DIVERSITY:** Children, teachers and materials reflect the cultural, linguistic and ability diversity of North Carolina. Children and families would come from “all walks of life.”

**INCLUSION:** All children would be able to participate in classroom activities with adequate supports and adaptations. Make sure that all children can see, hear and use books, writing instruments and computers. Support development of home language use by having bilingual staff and knowing key phrases in all language spoken by the families of the children in the classroom.

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:** Create meaningful opportunities for family engagement by talking with families about their concerns, ideas, and priorities. Develop partnerships with families where schools and families play equal roles in the children’s education. Programs that offer home visits often report better relationships with families. Family partnerships equal better outcomes.

**INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT:** The most important aspect of a pre-kindergarten and kindergarten learning environment is the positive and consistent interactions among children and among adults and children. Adults should engage children in real conversations every day.



All children should be communicating and actively engaged in meaningful activities throughout the day in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Open-ended questions and comments should predominate; for example, “Tell me about your drawing,” “How did you name that book?” and “How did you make that book?”

**PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENT:** Meaningful print, e.g., children’s work, current poems and songs, and print that is actually used should be displayed at children’s eye-level. Alphabet books, story books, and informational texts books that are related to the theme of each learning center should be displayed and used in that center. Printed materials should be in English and in children’s home languages and used for functional purposes.

**LITERACY ROLE MODELS:** Adults model the use of print by following recipes, completing and following lists, writing down and posting what children say and do, giving children written comments on their play, ordering from a menu in the pretend restaurant or shopping from a list in a pretend grocery store.

**ACCESSIBLE LITERACY MATERIALS:** Laminated books, page “fluffers,” adapted crayon holders, sign language and communication boards/devices can make literacy materials accessible. Make sure all children can use literacy-related materials and that they have some way to communicate while reading, drawing, writing, telling and acting out stories.

**ONGOING OBSERVATIONAL ASSESSMENT:**

Teachers make notes of what children are doing and saying, keep samples of children’s writings and drawings and take pictures/videos of children’s play in order to document children’s development over time and to inform their instruction.

**READING AND WRITING:**

Do it everywhere, everyday, all of the time. Paper, chalk boards, white boards and accessible writing instruments are readily accessible to children in every center (and outdoors) so that they can make signs, write notes, draw pictures about what they are doing and communicate messages to others.



## **CENTER ON LITERACY**

In addition to conventional objects found in a pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classroom, this list is a non-exhaustive compilation of items available to all children in a literacy-rich environment. Printed items should reflect different languages. Pictures and communication symbols with associated words should be displayed in all areas for children not currently communicating all that they can through speech. Books and writing and drawing instruments should be adapted for children with physical and sensory impairments. These items are supportive of literacy-learning **ONLY** if adults model, use, and talk about what they and the children are doing. When possible, provide the following literacy opportunities for children in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

### **GREETING AREA**

- Sign-in area for children to find their names/ pictures, write, or otherwise indicate that they have arrived
- Classroom news – what are we working on, special events
- Family information – pictures, notes to parents
- Labeled space for each child's belongings
- "Me Museum" displaying labeled artifacts of the child featured for a special time
- "Question of the Day" chart for children to respond by writing their names

### **GROUP MEETING AREA**

- Chore charts
- Lunch and snack menus
- Featured books of interest
- Classroom rules
- Classroom schedule (picture and written forms)
- ABC/logo/environmental print
- Word wall (kindergarten)
- Children's dictionaries
- Weather chart/station

## **OUTDOORS**

- Outdoor easel with paint, markers
- Picture symbols available for children to indicate a choice of outdoor activities or that they are hot, thirsty, etc
- Books showing children playing outside
- Stop sign and other directionality signs, logos
- Written/pictured scavenger hunts
- Accessible paper, white boards, chalk boards and writing/drawing instruments, including sidewalk chalk for children to
  - make signs for their pretend play
  - make signs about their building projects
  - chart outdoor science projects like plant growth and bird watching
  - develop projects

## **ART/CREATIVITY CENTER**

- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- A variety of art materials including natural materials
- Written/pictured directions/suggestions to follow
- Books, postcards, magazines, catalogues, and pictures of famous paintings and artists
- Playdough alphabet cutters

## **DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER**

- Teacher-and-child made cookbooks and recipe cards and menus
- Empty food and other product containers with labels and logos on them (if permitted)
- Telephone books
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers, checkbooks, credit cards
- Envelopes, stickers, stationary, mailbox
- Filing cabinet, file folders
- Thematically related children's books and props (e.g., post office, zoo, airport, restaurants)
- Shopping bags, coupons
- Magazines, newspapers, catalogs
- Tickets (e.g., movie, play, airplane)
- Print items children bring in from their home experiences (e.g., cards, letters)

## **WOODWORKING CENTER**

- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Written picture directions for children to follow
- Books related to wood working

## **BLOCK CENTER**

- Tape, cardboard (all shapes/sizes)
- Blocks covered in plain paper
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Books and pictures of buildings, highways, farms, bridges, etc.
- Blocks with ABCs or storybook characters on them
- Blocks with different sound makers inside of them
- Yellow construction/caution tape
- Work in progress signs
- Miniature dolls/people of various cultures, ages and abilities

## **WRITING CENTER**

- Computer and appropriate exploratory software, printer
- Journals
- Rubber stamps and ink pads
- All kinds of paper
- All kinds of pencils, pens, markers, chalk
- Clipboards
- Envelopes, stationary, stickers, address labels, name tags
- Junk mail, email
- Staples, stapler, paper clips, hole punchers, stamp punchers, tape, rulers
- Sandpaper letters
- Individual mail boxes for children to write notes and for parents to send in notes to their children

## **READING CENTER**

- Check-out library cards and system to use them
- All kinds of books – story books, non-fiction, poetry and wordless picture books displayed so that all children can see the covers and access and use each book
- Books on tape, labeled with the book names
- Tape recorders for children to record their own stories
- Book cover display

## **SCIENCE CENTER**

- Charts and diagrams reflecting children's preferences, thoughts, ideas
- Simple written/picture directions for children to follow for science experiments
- Books related to items in the science area (insects, fish, leaves)
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper, clipboards
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Rulers, string, tape
- Large Outdoor Thermometer

## **MUSIC CENTER**

- Song books
- Movement, instrument charts
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper, pencils, crayons, markers to write songs, make "favorites" charts, record movement/dances
- Videos of songs with words shown on the screen
- Karaoke machine or microphone for children to sing with amplification and/or word cues

## **SNACK/EATING AREA**

- Menus, school menus for lunch
- Notes from parents in children's lunch bags or to be put on lunch trays
- Charts for children to indicate favorite foods and preferences
- Paper and pencils for teachers and children to write grocery lists
- Picture symbols for reminders of correct sequence to wash hands
- Posters and familiar poems on the walls (if permitted)

**EVERYWHERE** – You should see children's drawings, scribbles, writings with written dictation (if needed) of what the children said and did while creating their work; photographs of children and families with captions describing what is happening in the pictures; child-made books and clearly labeled areas, shelves, drawers, containers in print/pictures/symbols in English and other languages both indoors and outdoors. Adults modeling, using, and talking about all of the above!



## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P.** (Eds) (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Preschool Literacy Information:** [http://reading.org/resources/issues/focus\\_beginning.html](http://reading.org/resources/issues/focus_beginning.html).
- IRA & NAEYC** (1998). *Joint Position Statement. Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. *Young Children* 53 (4), 30-46.
- Roskos, K., Christie, J., Richgels, D.** (March, 2003). *The essentials of early literacy instruction*. *Young Children* 58(2), 52-60.
- McGregor, G. & Vogelsberg, R.T.** (1998). *Inclusive schooling practices: Pedagogical and research foundations*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Miller, P., Fader, L., Vincent, L.J.** (2000). *Preparing early childhood educators to work with families who have exceptional needs*. In *New teachers for a new century: The future of early childhood professional preparation*. Washington, DC: National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, U.S. Department of Education.
- National Center for Family Literacy.** (2005). *National early literacy panel: Synthesizing the scientific research on development of early literacy in young children*. Available at <http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/family/ncfl/NELP2006Conference.pdf>.
- N.C. Department of Public Instruction** (2009). *North Carolina Guide for the Early Years Second Edition*. Raleigh, NC: Author.
- N.C. Department of Public Instruction.** *NC Standard Course of Study, K-12*. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/>
- Odom, S.L. (Ed.)** (2002). *Widening the circle: Including children with disabilities in preschool programs*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ostrosky, M.M. & Horn, E. (Eds.)** (2002). *Assessment: Gathering meaningful information*. Monograph Series No. 4. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Pierce, P., Abraham, L., Rosenkoetter, S., Summer, G., & Knapp-Philo, J.** (in press). *Literacy development for professionals and children*. In P.J. Winton, J.A. McCollum, & C. Catlett (Eds.), *Preparing and supporting effective professionals: Evidence and applications in early childhood and early intervention*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three Press.



- Powell, D. R.** (2000). *Preparing early childhood professionals to work with families. In New teachers for a new century: The future of early childhood professional preparation.* Washington, DC: National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, U.S. Department of Education.
- Smith, B.J., Miller, P.S., & Bredekamp, S.** (1998). *Sharing responsibility: DEC-, NAEYC-, and Vygotsky-based practices for quality inclusion.* Young Exceptional Children, 2(1), 11-20.
- Smith, M., Dickinson, D., Sangeorge, A., & Anastasopoulos, L.** (2002). *Early Literacy and Language Classroom Observation Scale (ELLCO).* Baltimore: Brookes.
- Snow, C., Burns, S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.)** (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Strickland, D., & Riley-Ayers, S.** (2006, April). *Early literacy: Policy and practice in the preschool years (NIEER Preschool Policy Brief, issue 10).* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Available at <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/10.pdf>.
- Turnbull, A.P. & Turnbull, H.R.** (2001). *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: Collaborating for empowerment.* Des Moines, IA: Merrill Publishing Co./Prentice Hall, 4th edition.

---

Visit the North Carolina Office of Early Learning Demonstration Programs to see evidence based practices at work. <http://www.ncprek.nc.gov/DemoSites/DemonstrationProgram.asp>

Contributors: Patsy Pierce, Ph. D. and Bonnie DiLeone, Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, UNC-CH, and Dan Tetreault, Janet McGinnis, Eva Phillips, and Cindy Bagwell, Ed.D., Office of Early Learning, DPI.

---

#### SPONSORED BY:



**Public Schools of North Carolina**

State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction  
Exceptional Children Division | Mary N. Watson, Director  
Office of Early Learning (Pre-K – Grade 3) | John Pruetto, Director